CULTURE UNDER THE MING*. RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

In religion and philosophy, the nearly three centuries of the Ming, when compared with some preceding dynasties which had enjoyed a long tenure, were somewhat sterile. Buddhism and Taoism continued, but no new currents of life which eventuated in important sects disturbed them. They were, indeed, suffering from slow inward decay. To be sure, they seemed securely fixed as permanent features of Chinese life. We hear, for example, as though it were in the Ch'in or the Han, of imperial search for the elixir of life. However, most of such activity in philosophy as existed was to be found not in them, but in the Confucian school.

Confucianism was the dominant philosophy of that scholar-official class through which the Empire was ruled, and was kept so by the civil service examinations by which the members of the group were recruited. In official Confucianism the school of Chu Hsi was orthodox. With the distrust of speculation and the premium on action which so characterized the Ming, an eminent authority declared that "ever since the time of the philosopher Chu, the truth has been made manifest to the world: no more writing is necessary: what is left to us is practice.'[5] He who would openly challenge such complacent and accepted dogmatism must have no common courage. The Confucian cult was reorganized. In the sixteenth century tablets were ordered substituted in the Confucian temples for images, the designation of the temple was changed from *miao* ("temple") to *tien* ("hall")—alterations which tended to minimize the religious element—and some lesser modifications were made.

Why there should have been less originality than

in some other dynasties must be a matter of conjecture. It may have been the absence of sufficient stimulus from the outside. No tides were flooding in from abroad so powerfully as had Buddhism in the centuries preceding and during the T'ang: neither Islam nor Christianity as yet attracted so great a following as had this other foreign faith. It may have been that, after freeing itself from its conquest by the Mongols, China was seeking to restore and preserve its cultural independence. It may have been the stereotyping of Chinese thought, through the agency of the civil service examinations, apparently now more fully developed than hereto-